

Dumas/Desha County, Arkansas

Dumas/Desha County Community Profile

Dumas is located in Desha County, Arkansas on the west bank of the Mississippi River in a region called the Mississippi River Delta. Much of the information for the area is available at the county level, and it comes from a variety of sources compiled in different years.

Agriculture is important to the county, which produces cotton, rice, soybeans and corn. In 1997, the county ranked 27th in the nation in rice production and 23rd in cotton.

Manufacturing, services, and retail trade, which have the largest numbers of employees, drive the non-farm economy of Desha County. In 1997, there were 4,824 employees in the county, 34 percent in manufacturing, 26 percent in services, and 21 percent in retail trade. The comparison to Arkansas is shown in the following Table.

| Employees | Drew Co. | Arkansas |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| Manuf'ing | 34% | 27% |
| Services | 26% | 29% |
| Retail Trd. | 21% | 22% |

There were 403 establishments in Desha County in 1997, with 29 percent in retail trade and 29 percent in services. None of the establishments employed more than 500 persons; 91 percent of them employed fewer than 20 persons.

| Estabmts. | Drew Co. | Arkansas |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| Retail Trd. | 29% | 26% |
| Services | 29% | 34% |
| Manuf'ing | 4% | 7% |

The population of Desha County was estimated at 14,855 on July 1, 1999, down 1.5 percent from the year before. Population was down 9.2 percent from 1990 to 1997. In 1996, the population was 54.4 percent white and 45.1 percent black.

Educational attainment in Desha County, for persons 25 years and over in 1990, was 56.5 percent for high school graduates (compared to 66.3 percent for the state) and 10.4 percent for college graduates (compared to 16.1 percent for the state).

Per capita income in Desha County was \$10,996 in 1990 (\$13,784 for the state) and \$14,901 in 1994 (\$16,863 for the state).

The Arkansas Workshop

Based on the TEAM Delta workshop held in Monticello, Arkansas on May 2, 2000, the current major issues in Desha, Drew, and Phillips Counties include:

- Education,
- Connectivity,
- Visionary leadership,
- Industry, and
- Loss of population.

Participants in the workshop also identified barriers and opportunities.

Obstacles

Major obstacles appear to be:

- **education** in general;
- **social capital**, including lack of trust (or teamwork, cooperation, or collaboration) and racial barriers; and
- **vision**, described variously as the belief that things can be different and better, seeing a way out of poverty, thinking outside the box, positive attitude, direction, good image, and not being resistant to change.

Opportunities

Major Opportunities include:

- **Natural resources**;
- **Sense of community** built around a good location, small town atmosphere, and emerging community leadership; and
- **New opportunities**, including eco-tourism, new markets, technology, micro-enterprise, changes in education, investments

in people, distance learning, and the ability to influence what is going on.

Workshop Evaluation

A follow-up evaluation/survey of workshop participants revealed community impressions about the topics offered at the workshop. The topics generally addressed how to create more local wealth and higher paying jobs, and information about the new technology-based economy. Dumas participants in the Arkansas workshop viewed the topics in the following way:

Highly Useful

- Science & Technology
- Workforce
- Social Capital

Average Usefulness

- Value-Added
- Clusters and Networks
- International Trade
- Venture Finance
- Service Economy

Low Usefulness

- Entrepreneurs
- Time-to-Market

The evaluation/survey also measured the popularity of strategies for technology-based economic development. Dumas participants in the Arkansas workshop assessed a list of strategies, as shown below:

Most Popular

- Improving K-12
- Industrial Networks

Some Popularity

- Entrepreneurial Education
- Tech Business Incubator
- Community Technology Plan
- Research Park

Little Popularity

- Angel Investor Network
- Focused Recruitment
- University Tech Transfer

Not Rated

- Manufacturing Extension
- Tech Focused Training

TEAM DeLTA Community Assessment

The Community Technology Assessment

The Dumas Community Technology Assessment was held October 25, 2000. Nine community residents participated. The session began with introductions followed by the TEAM Delta facilitator asking three questions concerning their attitudes about different kinds of investments.

The first question asked participants to assume that they had \$100 to spend on the following three things: (a) recruiting businesses to the community, (b) assisting existing business to expand, and (c) helping new, start-up businesses. The \$100 could be divided among the three things in any proportion desired. The Dumas participants (n=5) allocated their collective \$500 for existing firms (\$230), recruiting (\$165), and start-up companies (\$105).

The second question asked participants to assume that they had \$100 to spend on the following three things: (a) education, training, and human resource development, (b) technology transfer and development, and (c) capital investments. The \$100 could be divided among the three things in any proportion desired. The participants (n=4) allocated their collective \$400 for education (\$165), technology (\$145), and capital investment (\$90).

The third question was whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the Internet was changing everything. Four agreed and added unsolicited comments indicating that Internet banking is the way of the future and that most things can now be done on the Internet without having to leave the house.

One person disagreed, explaining that we have to maintain personal relationships. One person indicated having no contact with the Internet.

These warm-up questions were followed by discussion and compiling four lists of technology resources.

Discussion about key firms, those adding value, exporting, and paying higher wages, led to the following list: Arkat Feeds, Akin Industries, Federal Mogul, Dumas Cotton Gin, and Leer.

Discussion about business partners that contribute to the success of key firms generated the following list: the city, the Chamber of Commerce, banks, the phone company, and Delta Memorial Hospital.

The discussion about soft infrastructure resources (e.g., schools, medical clinics, etc.) in the community resulted in the following list: public schools, Great River Vo-tech school, Dumas Adult Education, Dumas Community Foundation, and Main Street Dumas, Inc.

A Community Profile provided by the Arkansas Community of Excellence program at the Arkansas Department of Economic Development assisted the discussion about the hard infrastructure resources of the community. Dumas' infrastructure needs include both traditional and new infrastructure. Regarding traditional infrastructure, four-lane highways are needed to Pine Bluff to the North, to the Louisiana state line to the South, and to the Mississippi state line to the East. New infrastructure needs revolve around increasing bandwidth to the community and the schools. Cost of bandwidth is a concern. Starting a new

business in Dumas is arduous if connectivity is an issue. The bandwidth issue is complicated because Dumas is geographically located between the service territories of Southwestern Bell and Century Tel.

The closing question for the group was what they wanted Dumas to be known for five years from now. Participants generally wanted to see their community as being progressive and with technologically advanced schools. They said, I want Dumas to be known for:

- ☐ Being a very progressive, exciting and inviting town!
- ☐ Children coming from the best (technologically-advanced) school system.
- ☐ Working together through all barriers including racial, socio-economic, etc., and becoming a highly progressive community.
- ☐ Its friendly people.
- ☐ The ability to change and grow with changes in the economy and technology.

During the Dumas community technology assessment, participants were asked to estimate the "connectivity" among the various organizations they identified among key, firms, business partners, and the community's soft infrastructure. Their responses indicate their collective opinion that the most interconnected resources in their community are city government, banks, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Next Steps

Participants identified bandwidth development as an implementation opportunity.